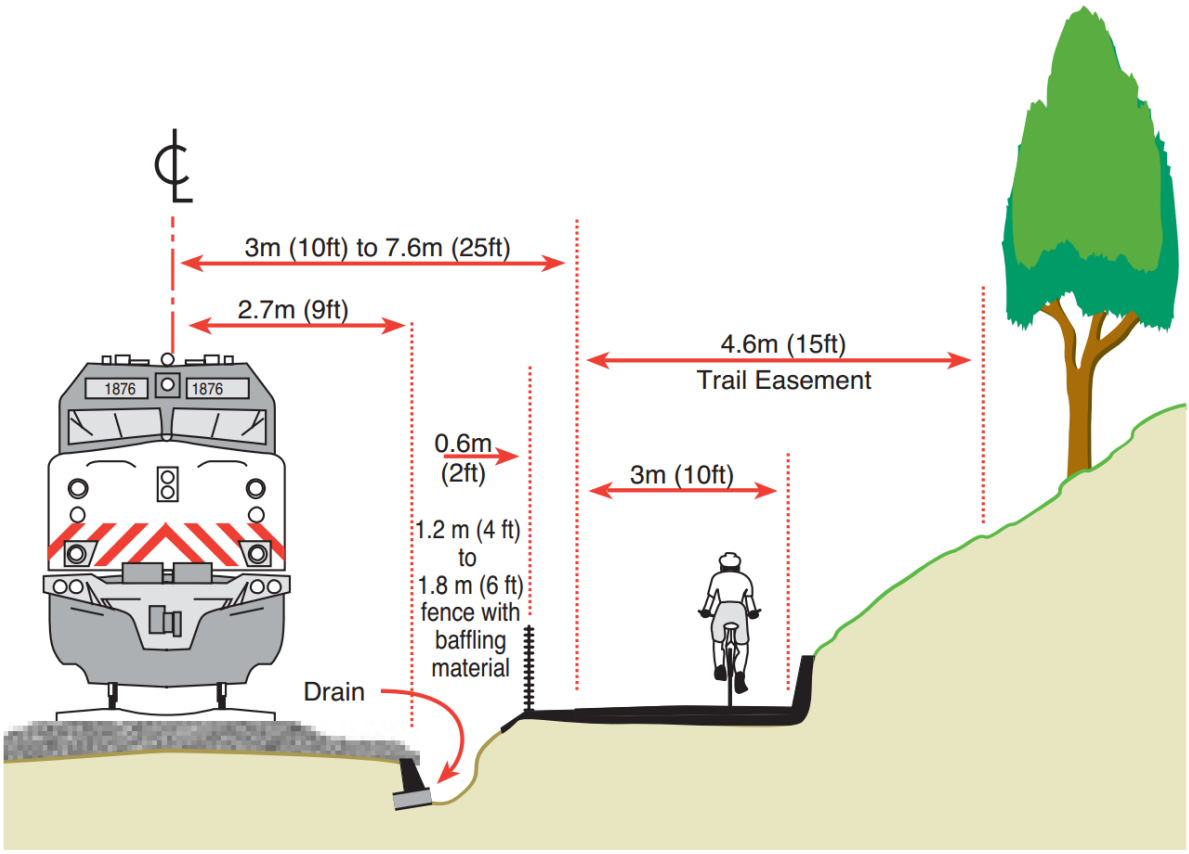
UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFICULTIES OF RAIL WITH TRAIL ALONG THE KINGSTON-ASHOKAN SEGMENT: A PRACTICAL EXPLORATION IN PICTURES AND WORDS

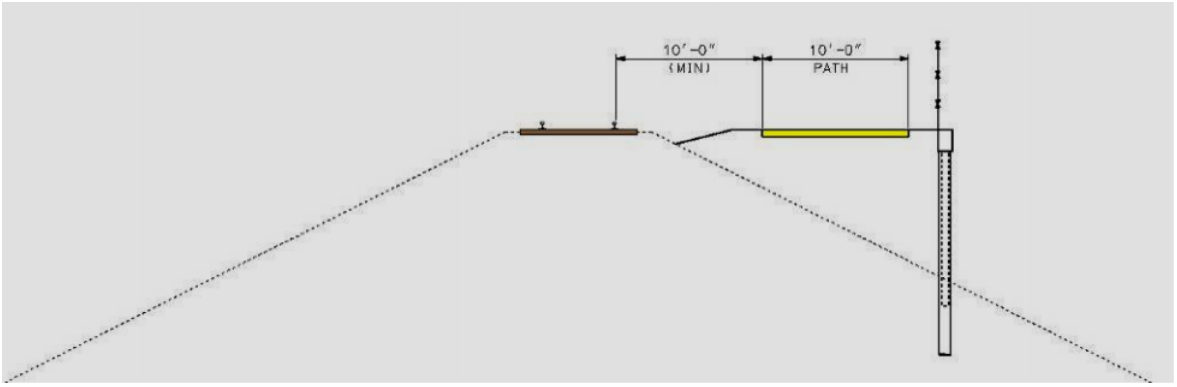


THIS IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT IT TAKES TO CREATE A SIDE-BY-SIDE RAIL WITH TRAIL. RAIL WITH TRAIL IS ALMOST ALWAYS DONE ON WHAT IS CALLED "A DOUBLE TRACKED" CORRIDOR. (SEE NEXT PAGE) THAT IS, THERE ARE TWO RAIL CORRIDORS SIDE BY SIDE AND ONE IS CONVERTED, (OR THERE IS A ROAD OR OTHER CORRIDR OF SOME KIND NEXT TO THE RAIL AND THAT IS CONVERTED). NOTE THE KIND OF SAFE AND REASONABLE SPACE—25 TO 40 FEET-- REQUIRED TO CREATE A TRAIL NEXT TO A RAILROAD, AS WELL AS PROPER DRAINAGE, AND IDEALLY SOME KIND OF BARRIER, LIKE THE FENCE SHOWN,

Types of "Rail" Trails

- **Rail to Trail**
  - Single track corridor
  - Economical conversion
  - Most shared-use trails
- **Rail with Trail**
  - Double-tracked
  - One track is converted
  - Not applicable in this instance
- **Rail PLUS Trail**
  - New trail corridor construction required adjacent to existing rail bed
  - No economical conversion

NOTE THE "DOUBLE TRACK " CORRIDOR IN THE BOTTOM PICTURE. ALMOST ALL EXAMPLES NATIONALLY, OF "RAIL WITH TRAIL" (ACTUALLY SHOWN IN A BOOK ON THE CMRR SAVE-THE-RAILS WEBSITE) ARE OF THIS NATURE. **NOT** THE ADDITION OF A WHOLE NEW TRAIL ON A SINGLE TRACK CORRIDOR, WHICH THIS SLIDE TERMS "RAIL PLUS TRAIL".



THIS SLIDE ILLUSTRATES WHY THE CONVERSION OF A SINGLE TRACK CORRIDOR IS ECONOMICAL. IN ORDER TO CREATE A PROPER TRAIL THERE IS THE NEED FOR A GRADE, SUB-GRADE AND TOP SURFACE. THE GRADE AND SUB-GRADE REQUIRE MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF FILL. CONVERSION OF SINGLE TRACK CORRIDORS IS ECONOMICAL BECAUSE THAT FILL IS ALREADY THERE. THE RAILROADS BUILT IT UP WHEN THEY CREATED THEIR RAIL CORRIDORS, CONSTRUCTING 'BERMS' ON WHICH THE RAILS RESIDE. TO CREATE A RAIL TRAIL, THE NEED IS ONLY FOR THE TOP SURFACE, WHICH IS ACHIEVED ESSENTIALLY BY REMOVING THE RAILS AND TIES, DOING A BIT OF GRADING, AND THEN APPLYING THE DESIRED TOP SURFACE MATERIALS (STONE DUST, PAVEMENT, EVEN LEFT AS ROUGH GRADE). COMPANIES SUCH AS IRON HORSE WILL OFTEN PERFORM THAT TASK, CREATING A WORKABLE TRAIL (AT LEAST ROUGH GRADED, PERHAPS EVEN WITH A STONE DUST SURFACE SUITABLE FOR ROAD BIKES, WHEELCHAIRS AND STROLLERS), FOR NOTHING –OTHER THAN THE SCRAP VALUE OF THE RAILS. THIS HAS HAPPENED IN NUMEROUS LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE COUTRY AND NORTHEAST.

NOTE HOWEVER, THE ADDED COST THAT IS CREATED FOR ADDING RETAINING WALLS, TRUCKING IN FILL, AND CREATING A WHOLE NEW VIABLE TRAIL NEXT TO A SINGLE TRACKED ONE.

WHO WOULD BEAR THAT SUBSTANTIAL ADDITIONAL COST IN ORDER TO PURSUE RAIL PLUS TRAIL?

A FEW PICTURES NOT INCLUDED IN THE CMRR PRESENTATION

THIS PHOTO SHOWS A SECTION JUST PAST ROUTE 209 ON THE HURLEY FLATS. NOTE THE TOPOGRAPHY AND ESPECIALLY THE WASHOUT. MORE RECENT PICTURES DEMONSTRATE ADMIRABLE RECONSTRUCTION OF DRAINAGE, AND ADDING FILL FOR THE TRACKS IS UNDERWAY. BUT HOW MUCH MORE WOULD IT COST AND HOW CHALLENGING FROM AN ENGINEERING STANDPOINT WOULD IT BE TO CONSTRUCT A 10 FOOT WIDE TRAIL, WITH 2 FEET OF SHOULDERS ON EACH SIDE AND A 10-25 FOOT SEPARATION SPACE, SOMEHOW SPANNING THE WASHOUT ALONGSIDE THE TRACKS THERE?

THIS IS LOOKING SOUTH FROM ROUTE 209 TOWARD KINGSTON. NOTE THE ‘BERM’ ON WHICH THE RAILS SIT. THE HEIGHT OF THIS BERM RANGES FROM 3 OR 4 FEET HIGH NEAR THE ROAD TO PERHAPS 8 OR 9 FEET HIGH FURTHER ALONG. NOW, IN YOUR MIND OR WITH YOUR FINGERS, CREATE A HORIZONTAL LINE FROM THE CURVE OUT TO VISUALIZE THE EXTENT OF RETAINING WALL NEEDED FOR RAIL PLUS TRAIL. (WHAT IS ACTUALLY PROPOSED AS METHOD AND MATERIAL FOR SUCH RETAINING WALLS? CEMENT PANELS? FOUNDATION AND BRICK? HOW DIFFICULT AND EXPENSIVE WOULD IT BE TO INSTALL THOSE)? MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF FILL WOULD ALSO BE REQUIRED ALL ALONG THIS STRETCH TO CREATE A VIABLE AND SAFE TRAIL. THIS APPROACH REQUIRES THE CREATION OF GRADE, SUB-GRADE AND THE TOP SURFACE, VERSUS JUST CONVERTING THE TOP SURFACE, WHERE THE TRACKS CURRENTLY ARE, BY REMOVING AND GRADING.

THIS IS LOOKING NORTH FROM ROUTE 209 TOWARD HURLEY ROAD. NOTICE THAT CONSTRUCTING A TRAIL ALONGSIDE THE RAILROAD HERE NOT ONLY WOULD ENTAIL THAT SAME NEW 'BERM' CONSTRUCTION OF RETAINING WALL AND FILL, BUT ALSO WOULD INVOLVE, ALONG MUCH OF THE HURLEY FLATS, THE TEARING OUT OF MILES OF MATURE TREES—NEITHER ECONOMICALLY NOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND.

ALSO CONSIDER THE CHALLENGE OF CROSSING 209 FOR RAIL PLUS TRAIL. A BEAUTIFUL PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE SPANNING 209 HERE COULD QUITE REASONABLY BECOME AN ICONIC ARTISTIC LANDMARK IN ITSELF, AND AS SUCH BE A MAGNET FOR PUBLIC/PRIVATE FUNDING. KEEPING THE RAILROAD WOULD REQUIRE A CROSSING GATE, WHICH WOULD CONCEIVABLY BE AN ALMOST COMPARABLE ADDITIONAL COST, BUT HAVE LITTLE PRIVATE FUNDING ATTRACTION, AND, IF RAIL PLUS TRAIL WERE IMPLEMENTED, AS PROPOSED, LIKELY AT LEAST DOUBLE THE COST.

THIS IS A TOP VIEW OF THE ‘BERM’ SOUTH OF HURLEY MOUNTAIN ROAD. NOTE THAT AT ABOUT 10 FEET ON EITHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS THERE IS A PRECIPITOUS DROP OFF. THERE IS INADEQUATE ROOM HERE FOR THE 25-40 FEET OF SPACING FOR THE TRAIL ALONGSIDE; EVEN IF THE TRACKS WERE SOMEHOW MOVED OVER TO ONE SIDE AS HAS BEEN SUGGESTED BY THE CMRR. (AND IS IT SAFE FOR A TRAIN TO RUN ON TRACKS CLOSER TO EITHER EDGE)? SO THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF A PLACE WHERE A RETAINING WALL AND FILL WOULD BE THE SOLUTION.

HOWEVER =➔

THIS IS THE SIDE VIEW OF THAT SAME BERM. THE BERM IS A 15-20 FOOT HIGH EDIFICE, COVERED WITH VEGATATION AND FINISHING AT THE BOTTOM IN A POND AND WETLANDS. IS IT REALISTIC TO EXPECT THAT A RETAINING WALL AND ADEQUATE FILL FOR A TRAIL ALONGSIDE RAIL COULD BE CONSTRUCTED HERE? (THE OTHER SIDE IS EVEN WORSE: IT DESCENDS TO A CEMENT PLANT.) LOOK AT THE PREVIOUS PAGE. ALL THAT WOULD BE NEEDED FOR A TRAIL ALONE WOULD BE TO REMOVE RAILS AND TIES AND RE-SURFACE THE TOP. TRYING TO BUILD A WHOLE NEW CORRIDOR ALONGSIDE THE TRACK HERE, IF FEASABLE AT ALL, WOULD BE ENORMOUSLY EXPENSIVE.

THESE ARE ONLY A SMALL SAMPLE OF THE CHALLENGES OF 'RAIL PLUS TRAIL' ON THIS SINGLE TRACK CORRIDOR. LEDGE CUTS, STEEP SLOPE CUT-AND-FILL SECTIONS, UNDERPASSES, BRIDGES—WHEN EXAMINED CLOSELY—ALL POSE EQUALLY DAUNTING AND EXPENSIVE CHALLENGES.

THE SHIFT OF THE CMRR FROM ITS PREVIOUS STANCE OF 'RAILROAD-ONLY' ON THIS KINGSTON-ASHOKAN SECTION TO NOW PRESENTING A 'RAIL PLUS TRAIL' PROPOSAL SEEMS TO REPRESENT A TACIT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING A TRAIL AS A PRIMARY USE IN THIS SECTION. PROJECTIONS BY THE WELL-RESPECTED CAMOIN ECONOMIC GROUP WOULD BEAR THAT OUT —

- 100,000 PROJECTED LOCAL RESIDENT USES ANNUALLY FOR TRAIL VERSUS ONLY 1,000 RESIDENT RIDERS CURRENTLY ON THE RAILROAD (REPORTED ON THEIR RECENT ANNUAL REPORTS).
- 34,000 PROJECTED NEW TOURISTS VERSUS ONLY A REPORTED 3,000 LAST YEAR FOR THE RAILROAD, ALSO EXCEEDING THEIR MOST OPTIMISTIC PROJECTIONS OF A 26,000 RIDER THEME TRAIN TOURIST DRAW

IN ADDITION, THE FOLLOWING ARE ATTRIBUTES OF THE TRAIL:

- FREE 365 DAY-A-YEAR ACCESS VERSUS FEE-BASED ONLY 30-50 DAY-A-YEAR USAGE (WITH THE CORRIDOR EMPTY MOST OF THE TIME WITH RAIL-ONLY OPERATIONS OR THE TRAIL COMPROMISED BY THE PRESENCE OF TRACK IN A RAIL-PLUS-TRAIL APPROACH)
- CULTURAL/ARTISTIC REVITILIZATION VERSUS ABANDONED AREAS THAT HAVE BEEN KNOW AS CRIME HAVENS
- NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION FOR SHOPPING AND RECREATION

- KIDS/TEENS BIKING AND RUNNING FITNESS PROGRAMS ACTING AS COUNTERS TO GROWING LOCAL AND NATIONAL CHILDHOOD OBESITY TRENDS
- CONNECTION TO A WORLD CLASS 120+ MILE ULSTER COUNTY AND HUDSON VALLEY RAIL-TRAIL SYSTEM TO ACT AS AN INCREASING TOURIST DRAW AS CONNECTIONS ARE FURTHER COMPLETED (THE GREAT ALLEGANY PASSAGE TRAIL OF 150 MILES HAS 800,000 VISITORS PER YEAR AND AN ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF $24 MILLION ANNUALLY — $700,000 IN INCREASED SALES TAX REVENUE)
- INCREASE IN REAL ESTATE VALUES AND WALKABILITY/BIKABILITY INDEXES AND A WELCOMING BY NEIGHBORS OF THE TRAIL, VERSUS DECREASE IN VALUES NEXT TO A WORKING RAILROAD AND HISTORY OF COMPLAINTS OF NOISE, POLLUTION AND POOR OR HARMFUL MAINTENANCE (E.G. DUMPING AND INDISCRIMINATE SPRAYING OF HERBICIDES) FROM NEIGHBORS.
- GRANT FUNDING ALREADY IN PLACE (BEFORE ANY CONSTRUCTION HAS EVEN COMMENCED) OF OVER $7 MILLION WITH POSSIBILITIES OF FURTHER FUNDING NOT EVEN AS YET TAPPED

IF IT HAS TO BE ONE OR THE OTHER, THE POINTS ENUMERATED FORM A POWERFUL ARGUMENT THAT THE TRAIL HAS MUCH HIGHER SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS.

BUT, WHY NOT BOTH?

THE ABOVE PRESENTATION, BRIEFLY ILLUSTRATING ONLY A SMALL RANGE OF CONCERNS FROM STUDIES BY REPUTABLE PROFESSIONAL SOURCES, ARE AN ESSENTIAL EXPLORATION OF THE FINANCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND TECHNICAL ANSWERS TO THAT INQUIRY…